

Message Text

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SUBJECT: 1976 POPULATION INCREASE - PROBABLE CAUSES AND GROC
REACTIONS

REF : TAIPEI 1066

1. PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS OF STATISTICAL DATA COMPILED BY FAMILY PLANNING INSTITUTE, TAIWAN PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT, INDICATES CAUSES OF OVERALL INCREASE OF 55,700 BABIES BORN IN 1976, COMPARED WITH 1975, CAN BE DIFFERENTIATED AS FOLLOWS:

A) INCREASE IN NUMBER OF WOMEN OF CHILD-BEARING AGE (15-44)-- RESPONSIBLE FOR ABOUT 35 PERCENT OF ADDITIONAL BIRTHS;
B) INCREASE IN NUMBER OF MARRIAGES IN 1975--RESPONSIBLE FOR 27 PERCENT OF INCREASE; C) UNEXPLAINED BUT BELIEVED OWING IN LARGE PART TO TRADITION THAT BABIES BORN IN YEAR OF DRAGON ARE PARTICULARLY FAVORED BY FATE--37 PERCENT.

2. NUMBER OF MARRIAGES IN 1976 WAS APPROXIMATELY SAME AS IN 1975, WHILE NUMBER OF WOMEN OF CHILD-BEARING AGE IS PREDICTED TO SHOW YET ANOTHER INCREASE NEXT YEAR, PROBABLY COMPARABLE TO THAT RECORDED FROM 1975 TO 1976. FURTHERMORE, THESE TRENDS NOT LIKELY TO REVERSE THEMSELVES FOR SEVERAL YEARS. CONSEQUENTLY, DESPITE MUCH PUBLICITY FANFARE ABOUT QUICKLY REDUCING ANNUAL POPULATION GAIN BACK BELOW TWO PER CENT, AND DESPITE FACT THAT YEAR OF DRAGON WILL NOT RETURN UNTIL 1988, KNOWLEDGABLE OFFICIALS ARE
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PRIVATELY EXPRESSING DOUBTS THAT ALL-TIME LOW OF 1.8 PERCENT WILL BE REACHED AGAIN FOR A NUMBER OF YEARS, LET ALONE TARGETS IN 1.5-1.7 RANGE FOR 1979-1980. MOREOVER, THERE IS AT PRESENT NO WAY OF JUDGING ACCURATELY WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS, WITH NEARLY 40 PERCENT OF LAST YEAR'S BIRTH RATE INCREASE ATTRIBUTED TO CULTURAL INTANGIBLES. THUS, RESEARCHERS ARE AWAITING RETURNS FROM 1977 (THE YEAR OF THE SNAKE,

TRADITIONALLY NOT A VERY AUSPICIOUS YEAR FOR BIRTHS) TO
CONFIRM OR UPSET YEAR OF DRAGON THEORY.

3. ALTHOUGH 3 YEAR (MID-76-MID-79) PLAN NOW IN EFFECT PROVIDES
FOR VERY SIGNIFICANT INCREASE OVER PREVIOUS YEARS IN FUNDS
FOR CONTRACEPTIVE PURCHASE AND DISTRIBUTION, AND FOR
STERILIZATION (FY1976 FUNDS WERE TRIPLE FY1975), NO
ADDITIONAL EXPENDITURES ARE PRESENTLY CONTEMPLATED AS A
RESULT OF THE 1976 JUMP IN LIVE BIRTHS. DIRECTOR OF
FAMILY PLANNING INSTITUTE, DR. T.H. SUN, HAS STATED THAT HE
DOES NOT BELIEVE SATURATING A COUNTRY WITH PILLS AND
CONTRACEPTIVES IS MOST APPROPRIATE TECHNIQUE FOR TAIWAN.
HE CITED FACT THAT PRESENT PRICE OF CONDOMS, LITTLE MORE THAN
ONE U.S. CENT EACH, IS SUFFICIENTLY LOW THAT EVEN POOREST
PEOPLE HERE CAN AFFORD THEM. THE PILL, LIKEWISE, COSTS LESS
THAN 28 CENTS PER CYCLE, AND IS FREE TO INDIGENTS.

4. EMPHASIS OF TAIWANESE FAMILY PLANNING OFFICIALS WILL
CONTINUE TO BE ON EDUCATION AND PERSUASION, WITH SPECIAL
ATTENTION PAID TO PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND ASSOCIATIONS
WHICH CAN ACT AS RELAY AND FOLLOW-UP MECHANISMS, HOWEVER,
A SERIOUS PROBLEM IN SPREADING THE WORD, IN RURAL AREAS
ESPECIALLY, IS LACK OF ADEQUATE FIELD WORKERS. THIS OWES IN
PART TO GOVERNMENTAL POLICY OF NOT HIRING MORE WORKERS IN
ORDER TO IMPROVE BENEFITS OF THOSE NOW ON PAYROLL. AS A
RESULT, CASE-LOAD PER WORKER IS NOW 7,800, AS CONTRASTED
WITH 4,200 IN KOREA.

5. FAMILY PLANNING INSTITUTE DIRECTOR BELIEVES THAT
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APPROXIMATELY 62 PERCENT OF COUPLES OF CHILD-BEARING AGE
UTILIZE SOME FORM OF CONTRACEPTION. 30 PERCENT OF ALL WOMEN
IN 15-44 BRACKET ARE THOUGHT TO USE IUD'S; 8 PERCENT, THE PILL.
SEVEN PERCENT OF POTENTIAL CHILD-BEARING COUPLES ARE SAID TO
USE CONDOMS, WHILE IN THE CASE OF 10 PER CENT, ONE PARTNER
IS STERILIZED. ABOUT 35 PERCENT OF THE CHILD-BEARING
POPULATION ACCEPTS USE OF VARIOUS CONTRACEPTIVE DEVICES AND
METHODS FOR SPACING OF BIRTHS, ACCORDING TO SUN. AMONG
INDIGENTS, ACCEPTANCE OF CONTRACEPTION OF ONE FORM OR ANOTHER--
MOSTLY THE IUD--IS ESTIMATED AT 80 PERCENT. AMONG PERSONS
IN THE 22-29 AGE BRACKET ACCEPTANCE OF THE NEED FOR FAMILY
PLANNING IS STILL GREATER IN URBAN AREAS (65-72.5 PERCENT)
THAN IN TOWNS (53 PERCENT) AND RURAL AREAS (57 PERCENT),
BUT GAP IS NARROWING. IN THE 30-39 AGE GROUP THE DIFFERENCE
IS NEGLIGIBLE (88-PLUS-PERCENT FOR URBAN AREAS, AND 86-PLUS-
PERCENT FOR TOWNS AND RURAL AREAS).

6. THE INCIDENCE OF ABORTION IS NOT KNOWN WITH ANY DEGREE OF
ACCURACY, NOR LIKELY TO BE ADMITTED OPENLY EVEN WHERE DATA IS

AVAILABLE. ESTIMATES RANGE FROM 10 PERCENT OF LIVE BIRTHS (OR 42,300 PER YEAR) TO MORE THAN 100,000 ANNUALLY. DR. SUN DOES NOT BELIEVE LEGALIZATION OF ABORTION FOR NON-MEDICAL REASONS WOULD HAVE MUCH OF AN IMPACT ON TAIWAN'S POPULATION GROWTH. WHETHER AND TO WHAT DEGREE THIS IS SO, OR IF TRUE, TRUE ONLY BECAUSE MOST OF THOSE WHO WANT ABORTIONS ARE ACTUALLY ALREADY GETTING THEM, APPEARS TO NEED FURTHER STUDY, BUT SUCH STUDY SEEMS RATHER UNLIKELY OWING TO POLITICAL AND SOCIAL SENSITIVITY OF ISSUE. EMBASSY SUSPECTS THAT ABORTION MAY ALREADY BE PLAYING MUCH MORE OF A ROLE IN KEEPING POPULATION SURGE FROM GOING OUT OF CONTROL THAN GROC OFFICIALS ARE PREPARED TO ADMIT, THOUGH INCLINED TO AGREE WITH DR. SUN THAT LEGALIZATION OF PRACTICE IS LESS LIKELY TO HAVE ADDITIONAL EFFECT THAN ARE INCREASED EDUCATION OF POPULATION AND PROCESS OF URBANIZATION.

7. THERE ARE SOME HOPEFUL SIGNS THAT POPULATION GROWTH WILL
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LEVEL OFF AND DROP BACK DOWN AGAIN AFTER A FEW YEARS, DESPITE PROBLEMS JUST MENTIONED. CONTRACEPTIVE ACCEPTANCE BY POPULATION IN 1975 AND 1976 EXCEEDED GOVERNMENT TARGETS EXCEPT FOR PILL (IN 1976), WHICH RECEIVED CONSIDERABLE ADVERSE NEWSPAPER PUBLICITY BECAUSE OF SIDE EFFECTS. STERILIZATION, THOUGH IN ABSOLUTE TERMS NOT YET A COMMON PRACTICE (40,685 CASES LAST YEAR OUT OF A TOTAL POPULATION OF MORE THAN 16,000,000), WAS NEVERTHELESS MORE THAN 100 PERCENT ABOVE EXPECTATIONS. EVEN VASECTOMY, VERY DIFFICULT TO PROMOTE IN A MALE-DOMINANT SOCIETY, GREW IN ACCEPTANCE, REGISTERING MORE THAN A 100 PERCENT GAIN OVER 1975. IDEAL FAMILY SIZE IN 1976 WAS DOWN TO 3.0, COMPARED WITH 3.2 IN 1973. THE DEATH RATE IS ABOUT AS LOW AS IT IS GOING TO GET, BARRING MEDICAL BREAKTHROUGHS ON DISEASES OF SENILITY. NEVERTHELESS, THE BOTTOM LINE REMAINS: FOR THE NEXT SEVERAL YEARS, ANNUAL POPULATION INCREASE IS MUCH MORE LIKELY TO REMAIN AT, OR SLIGHTLY ABOVE, 2 PERCENT, THAN TO RETREAT TO 1.8 PERCENT. THE CRUDE BIRTH RATE IN 1976 WAS 25.9 PER THOUSAND, AND THE RATE OF NATURAL INCREASE 21.2 (THE SAME AS IN 1971). THE LATTER FIGURE IS ALMOST 26 PERCENT ABOVE THAT ASSUMED BY THE GROC IN FORMULATING ITS SIX YEAR DEVELOPMENT PLAN (1976-1981), IMPLYING MAJOR ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS FOR EDUCATIONAL AND HEALTH FACILITIES, HOUSING, FOODSTUFFS, AND TRANSPORTATION AND COMMUNICATIONS INFRASTRUCTURE.
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